



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 15 – 21 February 2010



17 Feb 1913 The Army first tested an **automatic pilot** device called a **gyrostabilizer** by its inventor, Lawrence Sperry (left), the son of the famed gyrocompass inventor Elmer Sperry. A gyroscope is a weighted, balanced wheel mounted in bearings and spinning at high velocity through a connection to a motor. The gyroscope holds its position, no matter at what angle it is held. Sperry's automatic pilot used gyroscopes to stabilize an airplane's controls. When they sensed movement, the gyros activated compressed air, which acted on pistons to activate the aircraft controls.

In 1914, Lawrence Sperry's device won an award of 50,000 francs from the French when he demonstrated the device in a flight over Paris. On the first pass, he took his hands off the controls and held them visible to the crowd below. On the second pass, he held his hands out while a mechanic walked out on the plane's wing. On the third pass, both Lawrence Sperry and the mechanic were out on the wings with an empty cockpit.

18 Feb 1918 The "**Lafayette Escadrille**" transferred to American forces as the 103rd Pursuit Squadron and began operations on the front under tactical control of the French. The "**Lafayette Escadrille**" was a unit in the French military comprised of American volunteers who joined the fight before the United States entered World War I. (See photo at right.)



On this same date, the first proper US fighter unit (95th Aero Squadron) arrived in France.

21 Feb 1924 **Carl B. Eielson** flew the first airmail from Fairbanks to McGrath, Alaska.

20 Feb 1934 The Army Air Corps was designated to take over all **U.S airmail operations** and made its first airmail flight. President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 6591 on 9 February canceling existing airmail contracts because of fraud and collusion. The Air Corps continued to operate airmail services until July 1934. (See photo of B-7 at left; four were lost with their pilots during the 1934 Airmail Emergency).



18 Feb 1938 **Jacqueline "Jackie" Cochran** received the General William Mitchell Memorial Plaque for her achievements in aeronautics, based on her speed records. In 1937, Cochran set a national air speed record from New York to Miami in 4 hours, 12 minutes, 27 seconds, and she achieved a new women's national speed record at 204 miles per hour.



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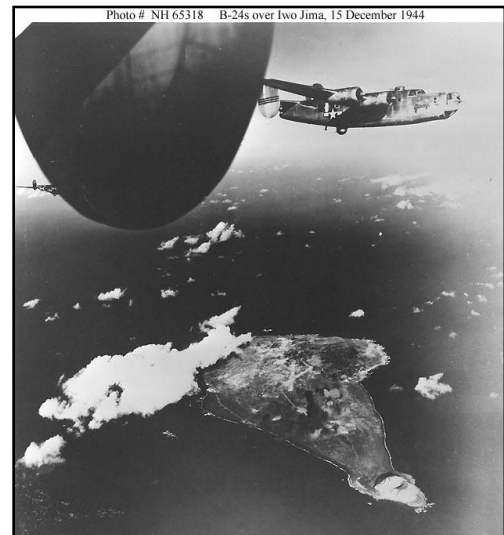
20 Feb 1944 **BIG WEEK.** Through 25 February, Eighth and Fifteenth Air Forces began Big Week air raids on German aircraft production. The planners intended to lure the Luftwaffe into decisive battle, achieve air superiority and then proceed with the invasion of Europe. Although damage to the German aircraft industry was only moderate, the newly arrived P-51 escorts decimated the pilot ranks of the heavy, twin-engined German fighters. These fighter escorts lowered US bomber losses from 30 to six percent and won air superiority over Europe for the rest of the war.



16 Feb 1945 **Army Air Forces C-47s dropped 2,065 paratroopers** on the Japanese-held island of Corregidor in Manila Bay in conjunction with a U.S. amphibious landing on the island. The goal was to secure the harbor of Manila, the most important city in the Philippines.

19 Feb 1945 After six months of aerial bombardment and three days of naval bombardment, **Iwo Jima was invaded** by the Marines 5th Amphibious Corps. On 26 March, organized Japanese resistance ended. Bomber raids from the Marianas had struck the island as part of **Operation Scavenger** (photo at right).

Iwo Jima was strategically important to the Japanese: it provided warning of B-29 bomber raids, served as an airbase for their interceptors, and provided a haven for their naval units. The U.S. capture of Iwo Jima provided a staging area for a potential invasion of the Japanese mainland, but the length of B-29 raids nearly in half and made a base available for P-51 escorts to protect the bomber raids.



17 Feb 1962 Formal dedication of **new Hawaii Air National Guard facilities** at Hickam included participation by the Governor, State Adjutants of the Army and Air Force National Guards, and the Hickam Base Commander. A fly-by of HIANG F-102 jets closed the morning ceremony, and an open house in the afternoon was attended by an estimated 10,000 people.

18 Feb 1965 **USAF jets soloed for the first time** without Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) crewmembers **in an attack against enemy targets** in South Vietnam. The USAF flew Martin B-57 Canberras and North American F-100 Super Sabres against the Viet Cong near An Khe.

18 Feb 1972 **PACAF assigned its first C-9A aeromedical aircraft** to the 20th Operations Squadron at Clark AB. The C-9s replaced C-118s.



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17 Feb 1997 The **Air Force Reserve became a major command**—the Air Force Reserve Command—reflecting the growing integration of Reserve and regular forces and the increasing role of the Reserve in regular USAF operations.

Feb-Apr 2000 U.S. Air Force personnel and cargo aircraft participated in **Operations Atlas Response and Silent Promise**, airlifting humanitarian relief supplies to Mozambique and South Africa following severe flooding in those nations.
(AF photo at right: USAF MC-130P reconnaissance of damaged roads in Central Mozambique, March 2000).



21 Feb 2001 An **RQ-1 Predator fired a Hellfire missile to hit a tank** at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, becoming the first unmanned aerial vehicle to destroy a ground target. Until then, the remotely controlled airplane had been used only for reconnaissance.

20 Feb 2003 The 65th Airlift Squadron marked the **initial operational capability of its new C-40B (#01-0015)** with a dedication ceremony. Aeronautical Systems Center, Boeing, and 15 AW personnel attended and toured the aircraft. The C-40 B/C transports U.S. leaders to locations around the world and performs other operational support missions. The C-40 B/C is based on the Boeing 737-700 but it has winglets. See photo at left.



21 Feb 2006 The **second C-17 Globemaster III arrived at Hickam**, with a celebration hosted by the Hawaii Air National Guard. Welcoming DVs included Major General Robert F. Lee, adjutant general of the Hawaii National Guard, and Major General Darryl Wong, Hawaii Air National Guard commander.